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SUBJECT: U/S BURNS' JUNE 12 DINNER MEETING WITH FRENCH
POLITICAL DIRECTOR ARAUD

REF: A) PARIS 2208 (NOTAL) B) PARIS 2257 (NOTAL) C)
PARIS 2359 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Craig R. Stapleton, Reason 1.4 B/D

11. (U) June 12, 2007, 8:30 P.M.

12. (U) Participants

U.S.
Under Secretary Burns
Ambassador Stapleton
P Staff Bame
Pol Recinos (notetaker)

France
MFA Political Director Gerard Araud
Elysee Strategic Affairs Advisor Francois Richier
Elysee Americas Advisor Damien Loras
MOD Diplomatic Advisor Frederic Mondoloni
FM Cabinet Advisor Philippe Errera
Political Director's Staff Gael Veyssiere

13. (S) Summary: U/S Burns and Political Director Gerard Araud met June 12 for a lengthy discussion of key bilateral issues, including Colombia hostages, Russia (MD and CFE), NATO enlargement/Georgia, Iran, Lebanon/Syria, Afghanistan, and Turkey/EU. Araud emphasized the new, more positive tone in the U.S.-French relationship since Sarkozy's election to the Presidency and affirmed that France would seek to avoid airing disagreements in public. Prior to the meeting, Burns and Araud exchanged information on the status of French and U.S. hostages in Colombia and agreed to consult in Paris and Bogota. Araud cited recent unhelpful Russian statements on Missile Defense and CFE deployments as indicative of Russia's bluntly assertive foreign policy. Sarkozy, said Araud, is seeking a positive relationship with Putin while at the same time pressing him without immediate success on human rights and Chechnya. Araud suggested that, on CFE, Russia might be justified in questioning the U.S. troop presence in the Balkans. The challenge is to find a middle way between complacency and confrontation in dealing with Putin and the new Russia, Araud emphasized. Burns and Araud agreed on continued public support for Georgian President Sakaashvili, while cautioning him against provoking the Russians. France, however, maintained strong doubts as to whether Georgia has an eventual vocation as a member of NATO. Burns pushed back, reminding Araud that we needed to safeguard democratic principles in Europe by being more inclusive.

¶4. (C) Summary cont'd: Araud agreed with Burns on Iran's non-compliance with UNSC resolutions, and on the need for an additional resolution and sanctions outside the UNSC. Burns stated that a diplomatic resolution was still possible and biting sanctions likely were necessary to achieve that end. The French registered Burns' statements that the United States had proof that Iran was providing arms in Iraq, to the Taliban in Afghanistan, and to Hizballah in Lebanon. French Presidency advisors, however, cautioned that the evidence was not yet strong enough in Lebanon to justify pressing Tehran; France also did not wish to risk losing its dialogue with Iran. On Lebanon, Araud agreed that France should have consulted the U.S. prior to initiating its call for a Lebanon "national dialogue" conference, and affirmed Sarkozy's intention to maintain existing French policy towards Lebanon alongside close consultation with the United States. On Afghanistan, Araud reiterated France's decision to increase its Operational Mentoring and Liaison teams (OMLTs) from one to four, bringing the total number of French trainers for the Afghan National Army to over 150 personnel. Pressed on PRTs, a Presidential advisor said that France was studying the concept and presented it to Sarkozy as one of several options. Araud added that European support for Allied efforts in Afghanistan was not open-ended. Araud also said that Sarkozy was seeking to decrease tensions with Turkey with a proposal to move forward on those EU accession chapters that would apply equally to membership and partnership status. Paris had also informed Ankara that the GOF would not support a vote in the French Senate on a controversial resolution on Armenia. End Summary.

Bilateral Relationship

¶5. (C) Araud began the discussion by noting that the Sarkozy government was opening a new period in the bilateral relationship. France remains a good friend of the United States, and will seek even closer ties with us. That said, France will not hesitate to express disagreement when France's approach differs from that of the U.S. Referring to past differences over Iraq, Araud stated that France sees no need to make our disagreements public -- we will discuss and consult first. Araud observed that former French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte, who is Sarkozy's new Diplomatic Advisor, has a track record of working well with the United States. Burns concurred, telling Araud that the U.S. had taken positive note of the new French government's decision to drop public calls for a "time horizon" for withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq.

Colombia

¶6. (S) In an aside before the dinner, Araud described how Ingrid Betancourt's release had become such an important cause in France, one which President Sarkozy had insistently associated himself with during the presidential campaign. Burns noted that since August 2003 there had been no proof of life of the American hostages in Colombia. However, extensive interviews with the recently escaped FARC prisoner had led us to believe the information he provided was credible; there may now be grounds for believing the U.S. hostages, held together with Betancourt, are still alive. Loras replied that based on French interviews of the same escapee, the GOF was skeptical. The information provided was far too detailed, possibly indicating it was planted -- and the whole "escape" potentially a fake. Araud and Burns agreed to further consultations between our missions in Bogota and in Paris. Loras asked that such talks begin in Paris. Araud referred us to the Presidency for future consultations on this sensitive topic.

¶7. (S) Comment: In a follow-up conversation with Pol/MC after the dinner, Loras was much less categorical, saying at least a week was needed to review the information concerning the hostages' well-being and whereabouts. We agreed to consult

closely, especially with the Presidency. End Comment.

Russia, Missile Defense and CFE

18. (C) Echoing almost verbatim his previous comments to visiting staffdel Myers (ref B), Araud stated that Russia has become a problem as it regresses to a traditional Czarist foreign policy -- imperialist and brutal, reflecting endemic racism, anti-Semitism and nationalism. By way of an example, he noted that a high-ranking member of the Duma recently exclaimed to a visiting French official, "so, you've elected the Jew Sarkozy!" Araud also observed that Russia feels besieged by NATO, the U.S. and the West. Faced with the "trauma" of dealing with Chechnya, and the "humiliation" of retreat from former territories during the Yeltsin years, Russia is unlikely to modify its imperialist foreign policy in the near future. Our collective challenge, emphasized Araud, is to find a middle way "between complacency and confrontation" in dealing with Putin and this "new Russia."

19. (C) Burns said that President Bush sees continuing value in the relationship, especially on such important issues as fighting terrorism and wmd proliferation, and so had chosen not to respond in kind to Putin's heated rhetoric. The U.S. has deliberately refrained from reacting publicly to Putin's recent provocative statements on CFE, MD, and other issues. Loras said that Sarkozy is seeking to develop a positive relationship with Putin, but without significant success to date. In their meeting, Sarkozy had raised with Putin human rights concerns, including the situation in Chechnya, the violent repression of a recent gay rights parade in Moscow, and the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya. Putin reacted by attacking human rights (prison conditions) in France. Additionally, Loras noted that two days after Sarkozy had lobbied Putin for the purchase of Airbus, Russia announced the purchase of Boeing aircraft.

110. (C) Araud stated that Putin had explained to Sarkozy the Russian proposal to locate part of the U.S. Missile Defense

(MD) program in Azerbaijan. The French were appreciative of the briefings General Obering had provided in France, as they helped to understand better the U.S. project -- and the Russian response. The Russians, Araud concluded, are trying to divide the Allies by questioning the Iranian threat and proposing a sensible alternative to basing MD defense in central Europe. Burns said that the Russians, in offering an Azerbaijan option, were, in fact, implicitly recognizing the reality of an Iranian threat and the need for missile defense. The United States, meanwhile, remains open to MD coordination with NATO.

111. (C) Regarding CFE, Araud ventured that Russia might have a basis for its desire for some reciprocity. The Russians had made progress in Georgia, yet we say we will never ratify until the Istanbul commitments are completely fulfilled: the GOF is not sure this is the best approach. Furthermore, the Russians could argue that U.S. bases in Bulgaria and Romania are intended not only for training, but in fact amounted to "substantial" new deployments. Burns pushed back, reminding Araud that Russia had concurred on those basing agreements. Araud agreed that the Russians were guilty of revisionist history, but the Allies nonetheless needed to offer Russia a way out.

Georgia

112. (C) Turning to the then-upcoming June 13 Sarkozy meeting with Georgian President Saakashvili, Loras commented that the Presidents had met twice before. In public, Loras added, France will convey a message of "strong support." Privately, however, the French planned to urge Sakaashvili not to provoke the Russians, to avoid raising tensions, and to work on the human rights situation in Georgia. The Georgians are looking to use NATO as a shield; they "should not play with fire" by baiting Moscow, Loras emphasized. Burns said the

USG also had counseled Sakaashvili against provoking the Russians, but Sakaashvili will be nervous until Georgia has obtained MAP. Burns explained that the U.S. had told the Georgian President that while NATO's door remains open, Georgia must meet its obligations under NATO.

¶13. (C) Voicing well-known French reservations over NATO membership for Georgia, Araud questioned whether membership ultimately made sense: "Georgia in NATO means problems; it should have the diplomacy of its geography." He pointed to Finland -- a prosperous and independent non-NATO country on Russia's border -- as a possible model. Presidential advisor Richier added that decisions on the borders of Europe for the EU and NATO were open. Is Georgia-in-NATO a security interest? Araud concluded by stating that Sarkozy has not yet addressed Georgia policy. Burns explained that the USG would like to see Georgia obtain MAP status and eventual NATO membership. We clearly have a different view of NATO: we see a political imperative in bringing in democracies. The same logic that brought the Baltics into NATO applies to Georgia. Russian objections should not block the membership track; Moscow should not have a veto. The future of Russia is not readily predictable, hence the U.S. would like to ensure that as much of Europe is democratic and protected by NATO as possible.

Iran

¶14. (C) Araud and Burns agreed that Iran is not complying with UNSC sanctions and continues to move forward with its nuclear program. Regarding next steps, Araud observed that while it may be difficult to obtain new UN sanctions with more bite, UNSC action nevertheless serves to provide legitimacy. He observed that the French Embassy in Tehran reports that U.S. financial sanctions have been very effective, but that Iran is not yet ready to yield to international pressure. In fact, the regime is in a hardening period. We must therefore manage the crisis for the long term ("pour la dure"), and keep our nerves. Richier suggested that we should continue to seek another UNSC resolution before proceeding to a review of other options including alternate sanctions -- on which Sarkozy would have to be consulted. He added that the United States and France should refrain from public discussion of such sanctions to avoid giving the impression, at this stage of

UNSC discussions, that we plan to move forward regardless of results in New York. Burns reviewed his recent discussions of Iran with Israeli officials, noting that they agreed with the USG that there still is time for a diplomatic solution. Stronger sanctions and economic pressure will be essential to achieving that end. Other governments must be convinced of that essential point.

Iran/Lebanon

¶15. (C) Burns also reviewed how Iran violated UNSC resolutions by providing arms to Hizballah in Lebanon, which appears to be taking new steps to threaten Israel, and to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Loras responded that, given that the evidence on Hizballah arms in Lebanon is not verifiable, France is not currently pushing Iran on this issue. Araud added that France is trying to keep open its dialogue with Larijani on Lebanon. All agreed that financial sanctions remain an effective way to pressure Iran to behave. Burns briefed Araud on the status of Iranian-American hostages held by Iran, and requested an appeal for their release by the French Ambassador. Araud replied that he has already raised the matter with Iranian authorities, and recalled that it had taken France a year to obtain the freedom of a French hostage in Iran.

¶16. (C) Araud stated that Sarkozy had told President Bush that France would maintain its policy on Lebanon, minus its exclusive Hariri focus. Sarkozy had also solicited President Bush's advice about talking with Syria. Araud said

Sarkozy responded that now is not the time, as Syria remains very destructive. Burns told Araud that the United States had been surprised at not having been consulted prior to France's recent call for a conference on Lebanon in Paris. Araud contritely agreed that consultations in advance were warranted. Returning briefly to a discussion of the renewal of UNIFIL, MOD advisor Mondoloni revealed that the French military would like to downsize its presence, but that civilian leaders had emphasized to them that political obligations were paramount.

Afghanistan

¶17. (C) Araud and Richier confirmed previous reporting on new French commitments for Afghanistan (reftels). They emphasized that despite campaign rhetoric, France is staying the course in Afghanistan. Paris plans to increase the number of French "Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs)," from the current one to four, bringing the total number of French personnel training the Afghan Army to over 150 trainers. They also noted that following a review of Afghanistan policy and, at the request of the Presidency, Paris was reexamining how to improve French assistance efforts. Burns asked about the possibility that France could establish a PRT, noting it was the only NATO Ally not so involved. Richier admitted that France is studying PRT operations, but that the option of establishing one had not been raised during earlier the policy review. It is important to note, he added, that in contrast to previous French positions, the Government is not dismissing out of hand the PRT option: Sarkozy had still not completed the review of, or reached to final conclusions on, France's Afghanistan policy.

¶18. (C) Araud reiterated the French observation that European governments and publics are not committed to a long-term engagement in Afghanistan: there is a certain "fragility to the European presence there." For example, the German government faces difficult battles with the Bundestag every time it needs to renew its military presence there. "We (Europeans) are in Afghanistan to demonstrate support for the United States," Araud added; Europeans do see it as a vital interest of their own. While France's earlier call for a "contact group" had been ill-conceived, urgent but discreet Quad format discussions are needed on preparing an "exit strategy" or "success strategy." Neither the Allies nor the Taliban can win decisively in Afghanistan, Araud commented. We therefore must continue work to get the Afghans to assume control of their future. Additionally, President Karzai needs to better address Pashtun grievances, which fuel support for the Taliban, he concluded. Burns, citing the

Balkans as an example, noted that the USG does not believe the Allies should leave Afghanistan any time soon.

Turkey

¶19. (C) In a brief exchange on Turkey, Burns reviewed the PKK's recent announcement that it would cease attacks, and USG contacts with Ankara regarding the negative impact of any cross border operation into Iraq. Araud related that Sarkozy and Levitte were seeking to decrease tensions with Turkey by supporting EU progress on 31 of the 35 accession chapters, i.e., those chapters that would apply equally to a privileged partnership with Turkey (the other four applying only to membership). Levitte had explained Sarkozy's position to the Turks during a recent visit to Ankara, where he also informed the GOT that Sarkozy would ensure that the Armenia genocide bill would die in the French Senate.

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